California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

Summary of Key Themes in Public Comments Regarding the Round 2 Draft MPA Proposals in the MLPA North Coast Study Region July 19, 2010

This document summarizes the key themes and major ideas that emerged from public input received through July 14, 2010 regarding the Round 2 draft marine protected area (MPA) proposals developed by the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) North Coast Regional Stakeholder Group. The public input was collected, through a series of public open houses, an online comment form, and comments submitted via email and U.S. mail. This document and a compilation of all the individual comments received through July 14, will be provided to the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) and MLPA North Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (NCRSG) to help inform the development of Round 3 MPA proposals.

Background

On July 6, 7 and 8, 2010, the MLPA Initiative hosted a series of public open houses to share information and receive public feedback on Round 2 draft MPA proposals and draft recommended special closures. The five open houses were held in Fort Bragg, Briceland, Eureka, Orick, and Crescent City. More than 150 members of the public participated and the MLPA Initiative received almost ninety sets of public comments.

The goals of the open houses were to:

- Solicit public review and input on Round 2 draft MPA proposals and special closures
- Provide an opportunity for NCRSG members to gain direct feedback on MPA proposals and special closures, which may include diverse perspectives
- Increase the general public and north coast communities' knowledge about the MLPA Initiative
- Communicate methods the public can use to become more engaged in the MLPA Initiative and the MLPA North Coast Project

The open houses involved a series of stations facilitating small group and one-on-one discussions among the public and members of the NCRSG and MLPA Initiative staff. As part of the open houses, members of the public submitted comments addressing a range of subjects, including Round 2 draft MPA proposals, special closures, individual proposed MPAs, and the MLPA Initiative's MPA planning process. Comments were received at the open houses and also submitted electronically via an online comment form, mail, email and fax through July 14, 2010. In total, 88 comments were submitted to the MLPA Initiative to help inform the development of Round 3 MPA proposals.

This document summarizes key themes that emerged from public input. While the key themes are not tallied to represent the actual number of such responses received, each theme is representative of comments heard throughout the public open houses. Example comments are provided for each theme to help provide context.

Key Themes in Public Comments

Characteristics of the North Coast. Comments submitted by north coast community members emphasize the unique conditions of the MLPA North Coast Study Region, including geography, weather conditions and the small population size; many believe these conditions already serve to minimize the impact to marine resources in this region and that additional protection from MPAs is not needed. There was also concern regarding the compound effects of MPAs and existing regulations on commercial and recreational fishermen, including areas set aside for conservation and private land ownership adjacent to the coast which already restricts public access and the take of marine resources. Examples of the submitted comments include:

- "... this entire North Coast is amply protected by weather conditions we have untold wind, fog, and rain conditions that make fishing an impossible action for days and days. Case in point; we have been here since the 11th of May and have only been able to safely fish 3 times to date." (Comment #12)
- "The North Coast Study Region includes an area that sees and is affected by a small number of people, especially when compared to other regions. This region is already heavily restricted by depth closures and by weather. Actual fishing days are very low because of our weather patterns, leading to a natural restriction to areas on the study region. Including these areas in the MLPA severely restricts any access and makes it extremely difficult for people of the area to make a living in fishing, tourism." (Comment #21)
- "I can understand the need to restrict fishing in the larger areas of the State like San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California but the North Coast Cape Mendocino north to the Oregon border is already restricted and its fish supply is not being severely depleted. Our portion of the coastline is not endangered, it is already well managed. Besides, there is not enough fishermen in this area to make a high impact, compared to big commercial fishing done in the rest of the State!" (Comment #32)
- "...For the proposed Vizcaino SMCA, 100% of the coastline is privately owned... In effect, Soper Company's lands are already a de facto marine protected area." (Comment #57)
- "...we [urchin stakeholders] are the most already regulated fishing community on the face of this earth." (Comment #58)

Impacts to the Local Economy. Many participants pointed out that there are existing fisheries management regulations and additional closures from MPAs would cause negative socioeconomic impacts to the local economy. Community members submitted comments expressing concern that MPAs would take away jobs, reduce access to fresh, local seafood for restaurants, cause loss of livelihood and local identity and negatively impact the tourism industry that attracts recreational users to the area. Some examples of these comments include:

- "Tourism in the Trinidad area would be severely impacted. Fishing brings so much money into our local economy sports fisherman spend money in our markets, hotels, bait shops, parks, restaurants...etc. Local fishermen if these MPA's pass will lose their livelihoods. This will depress our already struggling economy. Reading Rock is already highly restricted. There is only one tiny spot where fishing is permitted. This proposed MPA is excessive." (Comment #32)
- "You are going to push all tourism out of any closures as a tourist we come and stay 5
 months of the year just for fishing... If they take fishing away piece by piece from the
 people there won't be a reason to come here. I know at least 5 families...that will not
 return if fishing is being taken away. " (Comment #33)
- "We live in a remote place that has few jobs. Fishing is the only thing left in the Cove that is legal...." (Comment #70)
- "Closures of recreational use will damage an already devastated economy in the Eureka area." (Comment #85)

Impacts to Tribes and Tribal Communities. Some participants expressed concern that MPAs would adversely impact California tribes and tribal communities by restricting their ability to gather for subsistence and cultural purposes. Participants expressed an interest in the MLPA Initiative exempting tribes from MPA regulations to allow for continued traditional tribal gathering.

- "...My Native American friends come here several times a year to harvest seaweed these proposals make it moderately difficult to follow the rules, even if they know them.
 They will be expected to get GPS devices just to harvest seaweed and fish Outrageous." (Comment #28)
- "None of these rules and regulations should pertain to the indigenous/Native tribes/groups. Mandate the commercial/sport fishing for non-Natives, but no one should try to mandate to us when, where, or how we should fish or gather. All that we do is in ceremony. These rights to this ocean were already given to us by the creator and man should not interfere." (Comment #46)
- "Federally recognized Tribal Governments and their memberships should keep their sovereign rights to fish and gather on the California coast at their leisure and create their own regulations on "what/when/where" (marine resources). Tribes should not be required to report how much, or the location of these marine resources as it has been their sustenance and way of life for thousands for years." (Comment #59)
- "Tribal usage in any of the MPAs as stated on proposals is essential. We gather seaweed, clams, and other edible items from the shoreline into the water. Please protect the ability for tribal members to gather traditional foods for self, family, ceremonial purposes." (Comment #74)

Need for Conservation. Several comments expressed the need to set aside north coast resources for long-term conservation, with a focus on protecting important habitats and

species. Some suggestions included coupling MPAs with adjacent state park land and mandating the NCRSG to meet the maximum science guidelines.

- "This is a great opportunity to meld a state SMR with RNSP [Redwood National and State Parks] and affect very few extractors and protect the public trust." (Comment #2)
- "You'll (we) have only one decent bite of the "conservation apple." I urge overprotection now in case of doubt re designation, as you can more readily move from SMR to SMCA in the future (vs the other way around)." (Comment #37)
- "I think it's important especially to have the estuaries protected given these function as nurseries and refuges, given the state of the salmon." (Comment #80)
- "We encourage the stakeholder group and the (MLPA) Blue Ribbon Task Force to strengthen the MPA proposals in keeping with Marine Life Protection Act science guidelines." (Comment #81)

General Comments about the MLPA Initiative. Some participants expressed concerns about the MPA planning process with regard to its ability to account for smaller, more remote communities, operate a user-friendly interface, represent current fishing restrictions in the outreach materials and account for all interests represented on the regional stakeholder group. Additional feedback about the process commented on the ability to make progress under severe time constraints. A few comments submitted also considered maintaining the existing MPAs (Proposal 0).

- "I object to the splitting of stakeholders into two groups. The stakeholders were supposed to be a representative cross section of interests, each individual bringing a perspective to the process that taken as a whole may have been representative of the population at large. Splitting this group in half results in both groups having only half of the whole perspective. If you hired a baseball team with experts in each position it would make no sense to field a team of only infielders or only outfielders. This tactic, even if justified in some way, has the appearance of deliberate manipulation to weaken the chances of a single unified proposal being developed. Divide and conquer appears to be the primary purpose. Correct this problem by putting the stakeholder group back together for the third and final round of proposal development." (Comment #20)
- "In general, the groups have done amazing work under tough time constraints so, thank you all for your dedicated service on behalf of the public." (Comment #37)
- "Information is massive and overwhelming and not enough time to digest everything for meaningful comment." (Comment #39)
- "Not user friendly--input deficient. Digital submission failed--hand written is not easy for everyone!" (Comment #45)
- "These maps are very deceptive. Why don't they show the existing 120' groundfish closure?" (Comment #64)

California Marine Life Protect Act Initiative Summary of Key Themes in Public Comments Regarding the Round 2 Draft MPA Proposals in the MLPA North Coast Study Region July 19, 2010

Specific Comments about Round 2 Draft MPA Proposals. Many participants made an effort to comment on specific MPAs and/or MPA proposals, including constructive feedback and unique suggestions for improvements.

- "I consider the Samoa SMCA to be a "ghost" MPA, as the proposed take regulations allowed, salmon trolling and crabbing (both commercial & recreation), are essentially the only activities occurring there now. In effect this MPA does nothing and was only put there to meet spacing requirements." (Comment #3)
- "I'm also opposed to the continued closure of Point Cabrillo to sea urchin harvest. It's been in existence long enough to have been studied and found to be overpopulated with sea urchin and a resulting overgrazing of kelp. A limited harvest would help the kelp bed rebound, with good results for other species i.e. abalone, rockfish, seals, sea lions, etc." (Comment #6)
- "Wilderness Unlimited would be more apt to support the southern portion of the Sapphire 2 plan in the Round 2 Vizcaino SMCA if the same shore access assurances were applied to the balance of the Sapphire 2 plan" (Comment #18)
- "Ten Mile Estuary SMCA needs to be changed to a SMRMA classification to allow for the continued opportunity for waterfowl hunting to occur within the estuary." (Comment #65)
- "Proposal 0 is appropriate given the healthy ocean ecosystem and the limited fishing opportunities in this area due to low population, limited ocean access, and weather and sea conditions that already severely limit fishing opportunities." (Comment #75)
- "Big Flat SMCA must allow for spearfishing and recreational take of abalone. Diving in this area has very minimal impact due to conditions." (Comment #78)